

10. OCCURRENCE OF THE BAT-FISH, *PEGASUS VOLITANS* LINNAEUS (PEGASIFORMES : PEGASIDAE), FROM THE COASTAL WATERS OF INDIA

Day (1889) recorded *Pegasus draconis* Linnaeus from the Andamans ; Johnstone (1904) and Munro (1955) recorded *Pegasus* (*Parapegusus*) *natans* (Linnaeus) from the Pearl Banks of Ceylon; and Munro (1955) recorded *Pegasus* (*Parapegusus*) *volans* (Linnaeus) and *Pegasus draconis* Linnaeus from Ceylon. According to Herre (1953) *Pegasus* (*Parapegusus*) *natans* (Linnaeus) and *Pegasus* (*Parapegusus*) *volans* (Linnaeus) are synonymous with *Pegasus volitans* Linnaeus. The family Pegasidae with one genus, *Pegasus* Linnaeus, with probably two degenerate species, *P. volitans* and *P. draconis*, is Indo-Pacific in its distribution, extending from East Africa to Japan and Australia.

Since Munro's record from the Gulf of Manaar, adults of *Pegasus volitans* Linnaeus have been unknown from the coastal waters of India. Jones & Pantulu (1958) reported a few post-larval stages of *Pegasus* (*Parapegusus*) *volitans* (*natans*) from the Orissa Coast and Krishnamurthy (1961) reported a single larval stage of the same species from the plankton collections off Porto-Novo, considered to be the earliest known stage for this species.

A single adult specimen of *Pegasus volitans* Linnaeus was obtained on 16 March 1965 from amongst the catches of *kondavalai* dragged from within a distance of about half-a-mile from the shore at Kovalam, 30 miles south of Madras. Subsequent catches from the same locality on the 22nd and 23rd March by *kondavalai* yielded no more specimens of this fish, indicating the comparative rarity of its occurrence. This fish is believed to inhabit rocky zones of the shallow in-shore waters, and one of the local fishermen identified it as *nāra ulupāthi* in Tamil—*nāra* refers to foul smell, and this fish is known to emit a foul smell while alive. There are two other local Tamil names for this fish popular among the fisherfolk at Kovalam, *vettu udupāthi* and *paravai udupāthi*, of which the latter refers to the resemblance of this fish to a bird. From the several local vernacular names in vogue, one can guess that this fish, though not reported from India earlier, is not so very rare.

The present specimen measures 57 mm. in total length. The colour in the preservative is dark brown above and paler below. The pectoral fin rays are brown-spotted and there are two dark bands across the caudal fin.

The present specimen of *Pegasus volitans* Linnaeus is deposited in the National Collections of the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta, with the Registered number F. $\frac{4383}{2}$.

